

# Jews Are an Iranian Tribe – like Persians, Kurds, Balochis, Azeris...

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What does it mean to be an “Iranian” tribe?

The entire Iranian plateau and its bordering plains, extends from Euphrates River in the west, to the Indus River in the East, to the Oxus River in Central Asia and Manych River in the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea in the North, and the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman in the south.

Many tribes that have historically inhabited this plateau that was once at the heart of the Persian Empire. These tribes include the Persians, Azeris, Lurs, Gilaks, Mazanderanis, Kurds, Zazas, Talysh, Tajiks of Tajikistan and Afghanistan, Pashtuns, Hazaras, Ossetians, and Baloch of Pakistan. “Stan” by the way is Persian for land. The language of Iran is Persian (the primary language of one of the Tribes; and the one with the richest literature and folklore).

There is increasing information now, that there is in fact one additional tribe with its origins in the region – not traditionally thought of as an Iranian tribe: Jews (or the followers of Judaism).

In a 2016 paper published in the Journal of Genome, Biology and Evolution titled: Localizing Ashkenazic Jews to Primeval Villages in the Ancient Iranian Lands of Ashkenaz; by Das et al. the authors trace the origin of Ashkenazi Jews to 3 villages in the northern region of the Iranian plateau. It is precisely from these villages that the term Ashkenazi derives from.

Here is a map depicting the predicted location of Jewish (triangles) Ashkenazi Jews (orange), claimants of priestly lineages (orange and black), Mountain Jews (pink), and Iranian Jews (yellow) alongside the ancient pre-Scythian individual (blue diamond). The inset shows the sample distribution in now northern Turkey, but part of greater Iran, where the locations of the four villages that may derive their names from “Ashkenaz,” and adjacent cities. Large (13–23%), medium (4–10%), and small (1–4%) circles reflect the percentage of Ashkenazi Jews’ parents born in each region.

Oh, you would say, the Jewish Tribe is much larger than Ashkenazi Jews. The more precise question is how Jews ended up in those villages to begin with?

What we now call “Jews” i.e. descendants of those that lived in Judea and Israel, have actually been residing on the Iranian plateau since around 727 BCE when they were captured by the Assyrian and Babylonian kings when they conquered Judea and Israel.

Yes, they lived in villages in Judea and Israel, but here is an interesting point: they were NOT Jews when they were captured and enslaved.

Read on.

The biblical books of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Esther contain references to the life and experiences of Jews in the Persian Empire and accounts of their relations with the Persian kings.

In the book of Ezra, the Persian kings are credited with freeing “Jews” from slavery – according to the decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia” (Ezra 6:14). This great event in Jewish history took place in the late sixth-century BCE.

After the conquest of Babylonia by the Persian Achaemenid Empire Cyrus not only freed the Jews but granted all the Jews citizenship. He allowed the ‘Jews’ to travel as they wished. Some went back to Israel (around 537 BCE), but

most chose to remain in Persia (Greater Iran, or the Iranian Plateau).

Thus, the events of the Book of Esther are set entirely in Iran. It is interesting to note that many Persian cultural influences remain to the present day, such as the Jewish festival of Purim which parallels a springtime Zoroastrian festival called Fravardigan.

For centuries, Jews on the Iranian plateau lived in their own small tight knit communities. Jews lived in the ancient (and until the mid-20th century still extant) communities not only in what is now modern-day Iran, but also in Jewish communities in Armenia, Georgia, Iraq, Bukhara (Central Asia), and Mountain Jewish communities in Turkey. And from these villages they eventually migrated to Europe and other lands.

But who were these enslaved “Jews” to begin with? And where did they come from (to have been enslaved and then freed in Babylon)?

The origins of Judaism according to the current historical view, in contradistinction to the religious accounts and legends described in the text of the Torah (the Hebrew Bible), lie in the Bronze Age amidst polytheistic ancient Semitic religions, specifically evolving out of Ancient Canaanite polytheism, then co-existing with Babylonian religions like Zoroastrianism, and synchronizing many elements of Babylonian belief into the worship of Yahweh as reflected in the early prophetic books of the Torah.

We know that during the Iron Age I, a new, distinct religion evolved from Canaanite polytheism. This process began with the development of Yahwism, the monotheistic worship of Yahweh that gave acknowledgment to the existence, but suppressed the worship, of other Canaanite gods. Later, this religion evolved further into strict monotheistic belief and worship of Yahweh alone, with the rejection of the existence of all other gods, whether Canaanite or foreign.

During Babylonian captivity of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE (Iron Age II), certain circles within exiled “Judahites” in Babylon refined preexisting ideas about their Yahweh-centric religion into divine law and covenants into a strict monotheistic theology which came to dominate the former Kingdom of Judah in the following centuries. But this religion was NOT Judaism as we know it today.

It only was **after** Babylonian captivity in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, and specifically from the 5th century BCE until 70 CE, that Judaism developed into various theological schools known as “Second Temple Judaism” which by the way is different to Hellenistic Judaism.

Most of what is known about Moses from the Bible comes from the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The majority of scholars consider the compilation of these books to go back to the Persian period, 538–332 BCE (when they were developed). Moses, by the way, was born in Egypt (by all accounts) – under the Pharaoh; and Abraham was born in Ur (in Southern Mesopotamia). If Abraham is the “Father” of Jews, then they are all Mesopotamian!!

There are currently two important hypotheses. The first, called Persian Imperial authorization, is that the post-Exilic community devised the Torah as a legal basis on which to function within the Persian Imperial system; the second is that the Pentateuch was written to provide the criteria for determining who would belong to the post Exilic Jewish community and to establish the power structures and relative positions of its various groups, notably the priesthood and the lay “elders”. Never-the-less, either way, the Jewish community adopted and became part of the Persian system – i.e. an Iranian tribe.

To be clear multiple forms of Judaism developed during the captivity. Interestingly, Hellenistic Judaism was a form of Judaism in classical antiquity that combined Jewish religious tradition with elements of Greek culture. As a faith, it was marginalized and absorbed into early Christianity Until the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the early Muslim conquests of the eastern Mediterranean. The word Synagogue is a Greek term.

Second Temple Judaism has become dominant. It is interesting to note that Second Temple eschatology is without question significantly influenced by Zoroastrianism (i.e. copy and paste from Zoroastrianism). The text of the Hebrew

Bible was redacted into its extant form in this period and canonized as well after the birth of Christ.

Rabbinic Judaism developed during Late Antiquity, during the 3rd to 6th centuries CE; the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud were compiled in this period. The oldest manuscripts of the Masoretic tradition come from the 10th and 11th centuries CE; in the form of the Aleppo Codex of the later portions of the 10th century CE and the Leningrad Codex dated to 1008–1009 CE. Due largely to censoring and the burning of manuscripts in medieval Europe the oldest existing manuscripts of various rabbinical works are quite late. The oldest surviving complete manuscript copy of the Babylonian Talmud is dated to 1342 CE.

It is interesting to note that there is no archaeological evidence of an extensive, powerful Kingdom of Judah before the late 8th century BCE; Nimrud Tablet K.3751, dated c. 733 BCE, is the earliest known record of the name Judah (written in Assyrian cuneiform as Yaudaya or KUR.ia-ú-da-a-a). Prior to this “the kingdom” was no more than a small tribal entity which was limited to Jerusalem and its immediate surroundings. The status of Jerusalem in the 10th century BCE is a major subject of debate. The oldest part of Jerusalem and its original urban core is the City of David, which does not show evidence of significant Israelite residential activity until the 9th century.

According to the Hebrew Bible, the kingdom of Judah resulted from the break-up of the United Kingdom of Israel (1020 to about 930 BCE) after the northern tribes refused to accept Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, as their king. At first, only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David, but soon after the tribe of Benjamin joined Judah. The two kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north, coexisted uneasily after the split until the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel by Assyria in c. 722/721.

A major theme of the (Torah) i.e. Hebrew Bible's narrative is loyalty to Judah, and especially its kings, to Yahweh, which states is the God of Israel. Accordingly, all the kings of Israel and many of the kings of Judah were “bad”, which in terms of Biblical narrative means that they failed to enforce monotheism. Of the “good” kings, Hezekiah (727–698 BCE) is noted for his efforts at stamping out idolatry (in this case, the worship of Baal and Asherah, among other traditional Near Eastern divinities), but his successors, Manasseh of Judah (698–642 BCE) and Amon (642–640 BCE), revived idolatry, drawing down on the kingdom the anger of Yahweh. King Josiah (640–609 BCE) returned to the worship of Yahweh alone, but his efforts were too late, and Israel's unfaithfulness caused God to permit the kingdom's destruction by the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the Siege of Jerusalem (587 BCE). However, it is now well established among academic scholars that the Books of Kings is not an accurate reflection of religious views in either Judah or particularly Israel during this period. Bottom line, these folks did not practice what is known as Judaism – as we know it today.

Prior to the captivity, there was no comprehensive Jewish faith. Being ancestrally from Judea, does not make you Jewish. Believing in Judaism makes you Jewish.

Coming to back to Judea or Israel, after the Babylonian captivity (in the Persian Empire, under the Persian King's Rule), believing in a new faith i.e. Judaism – yes, makes you by all accounts “Jewish”. But NOTE, many of those who adopted the new religion, i.e. Judaism, in captivity went to other parts of the Iranian plateau i.e. did NOT go ‘back’ to Israel.

Understanding Judaism and the nature of the Babylonian captivity is crucial.

Judaism has three essential and related elements: study of the written Torah (the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy); the recognition of Israel (defined as the descendants of Abraham through his grandson Jacob) as a people elected by God as recipients of the law at Mount Sinai, his chosen people; and the requirement that Israel live in accordance with God's laws as given in the Torah.

For those in captivity, having originally come from Judea and/or Israel, the concept of ‘Loyalty to Israel’ is fundamental to maintaining morale i.e. it provided hope and aspiration that one day they would be free. It was precisely in Babylon, under Persian rule, that the captives created a new religion and a religious allegiance to their former homes i.e. Judea and Israel. But they did NOT follow the Jewish faith when they first got there. Again, the religion was created or invented during the captivity. They were in Babylon when it was established. And many of

those in captivity, in Babylon, never went back to Judea or Israel – but became what is now termed Jewish and thus have a ‘Loyalty to Israel’!

If the inhabitants of Judea and Israel where never captured by the Assyrians and held as slaves in Babylon, there may never have been a need to establish a religion with Loyalty to Israel.

But, in fact, in truth, Judaism started in Babylon; and the Jews where in effect an Iranian tribe on the Iranian plateau and later dispersed within the Persian Empire – which at the time included Judea and Israel.

If Jews have a claim on what is now Israel, or Palestine or the west bank – then hey, Iranians (the descendants of the Persian Empire) do too!

In fact, most slaves in Babylon, dispersed to other parts of the Iranian plateau! Only a fraction of the enslaved group ever came back to their home villages in Judea and Israel. Literally since the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC, most Jews lived outside Judea and Israel.

Judaism was therefore invented in Babylon within “Greater Iran”. And once invented, Jews dispersed within the Persian Empire. And by the way, the religion that was invented has borrowed liberally from Zoroastrianism, the religion prevalent within the Persian Empire.

Jews are Iranian.